

Suburban Committee Concept Paper

Draft- 11/02/05

Background

Increasing population, rising land prices and changing life styles are pushing a demand for urban type settings outside Loop 610, the area designated as 'Urban' in Chapter 42. While more developers are trying to accommodate this demand for higher densities and mixed uses, present regulations do not facilitate much in the way of innovation. Instead, a complex process to obtain a variance must be followed and the approvals are not predictable.

In 1999, substantive changes were made to planning standards for the urban area- allowing for higher densities, decreased setbacks, smaller lot sizes- while suburban standards remained largely unchanged. Last Spring, the Suburban Subcommittee was charged with the task of considering what elements of our urban rules would make sense if applied in the suburbs. Over the past six months, the committee considered the four concepts described below. While members have given their support to each of these, more work will be needed to iron out the details.

Recommendations

1. Mixed Use Areas. The Urban Center or Mixed Use Area (MUA) designation will foster mixed use, high density development that reduces auto dependency and creates a high-quality pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive environment. In areas under an MUA designation, altered regulations and infrastructure policies will allow and encourage more "urban" development without the need to apply for variances, provided that such development meets a set of pre-defined "performance standards." Provisions of MUA standards must address both long term redevelopment of existing, multi-owner areas like Westchase and "greenfield" and "greyfield" sites that would be unified projects by a single owner..

The development of an MUA ordinance will be necessarily complex and involve regulations and policies that fall under multiple existing ordinances and across multiple city departments. The end result, however, must be a set of regulations and policies that are as clear and objective as possible. To address this issue, the Committee recommends that the Planning Commission request the creation of an MUA Working Group. This public-private collaborative body would be composed of representatives from the Planning, Public Works and Legal Departments; the other Planning Commission committees; the development, real estate, and planning community; and activity center organizations such as management districts.. The MUA Working Group would be charged specifically with the formulation of an MUA ordinance or set of ordinances, including the specific performance standards and altered development regulations and policies that would result from meeting those standards. In addition to the resources of the Planning, Public Works and Legal Departments, the Working Group may also utilize

resources and expertise provided by its other participants in order to accomplish its tasks in a more expedient fashion.

2. *Amenities Plan.* As developers are challenged to meet more stringent detention requirements, requests to combine detention facilities with compensating open space are becoming more frequent. While Chapter 42 calls for an amenities plan to ensure that the proposed facility will also serve the community, no guidance is provided regarding criteria and level of detail to be covered in such a plan. After detailed discussions including meetings with Public Works and Engineering officials and stormwater experts, the following concepts and criteria are recommended for further study:

- ♦ Easy access to the open space/detention areas is essential. When the bottom of a detention facility is used for active recreation, the side slopes should be constructed at a 4:1 ratio.
- ♦ Credit for compensating open space should not be given when the proposed detention facilities will be equipped to satisfy NPDES requirements unless asystem will be implemented to trap debris. This is to ensure that the resulting open space will be useable by the public and will not be an eyesore.
- ♦ Open space/detention facilities must be maintained regularly.
- ♦ Open space is valuable to a community whether is intended for active or passive recreation including marshy areas that serve as wildlife habitat.
- ♦ Criteria may vary according to the size and shape of the facility.
- ♦ Structures and landscaping may be located in the detention facility as long as the required capacity of the facility is maintained.

In addition the committee recommends that the Planning Department request PWE review amenities plans until such time as definitive criteria can be established.

3. *Reserves.* Ordinance language pertaining to reserves is unclear and, in some cases, may discourage beneficial uses. To provide clarification, a matrix is proposed that clearly states the requirements for various reserves. Also, to resolve some problems with the current requirements and to accommodate new, higher density, development trends some adjustments are proposed relative to street widths, minimum frontage and square foot requirements. See Appendix B (*matrix distributed at last meeting*) to review the matrix and proposed changes. The committee recommends that Chapter 42 be amended to include the matrix and that sufficient review of proposed changes occurs by engineers.

4. *Courtyards.* Over the past several years, Planning Commission considered several projects that proposed to create more pedestrian friendly communities. The concept included single family residences on small lots that front on courtyards. Vehicular access would be taken from the rear of the lot via private alleys. By granting several variances, Planning Commission allowed these projects to go forward. To encourage similar developments, the Suburban Committee considered possible amendments to Chapter 42 that would allow these developments to occur without requiring variances.

The Committee agreed to the following concepts; however, further study and discussion is needed to consider appropriate criteria and to evaluate the possible consequences of implementing any changes.

- ♦ Connectivity via greenbelts should be provided in larger projects
- ♦ Courtyards should have a width of at least 25'
- ♦ Overall size of greenspace should be ratio of depth to width
- ♦ Width of greenspace may also be a function of building height to prevent 'canyon' effects
- ♦ 0' setbacks are ok

DELETE APPENDIX "A"

Appendix B: Reserves Matrix

See handout from last meeting